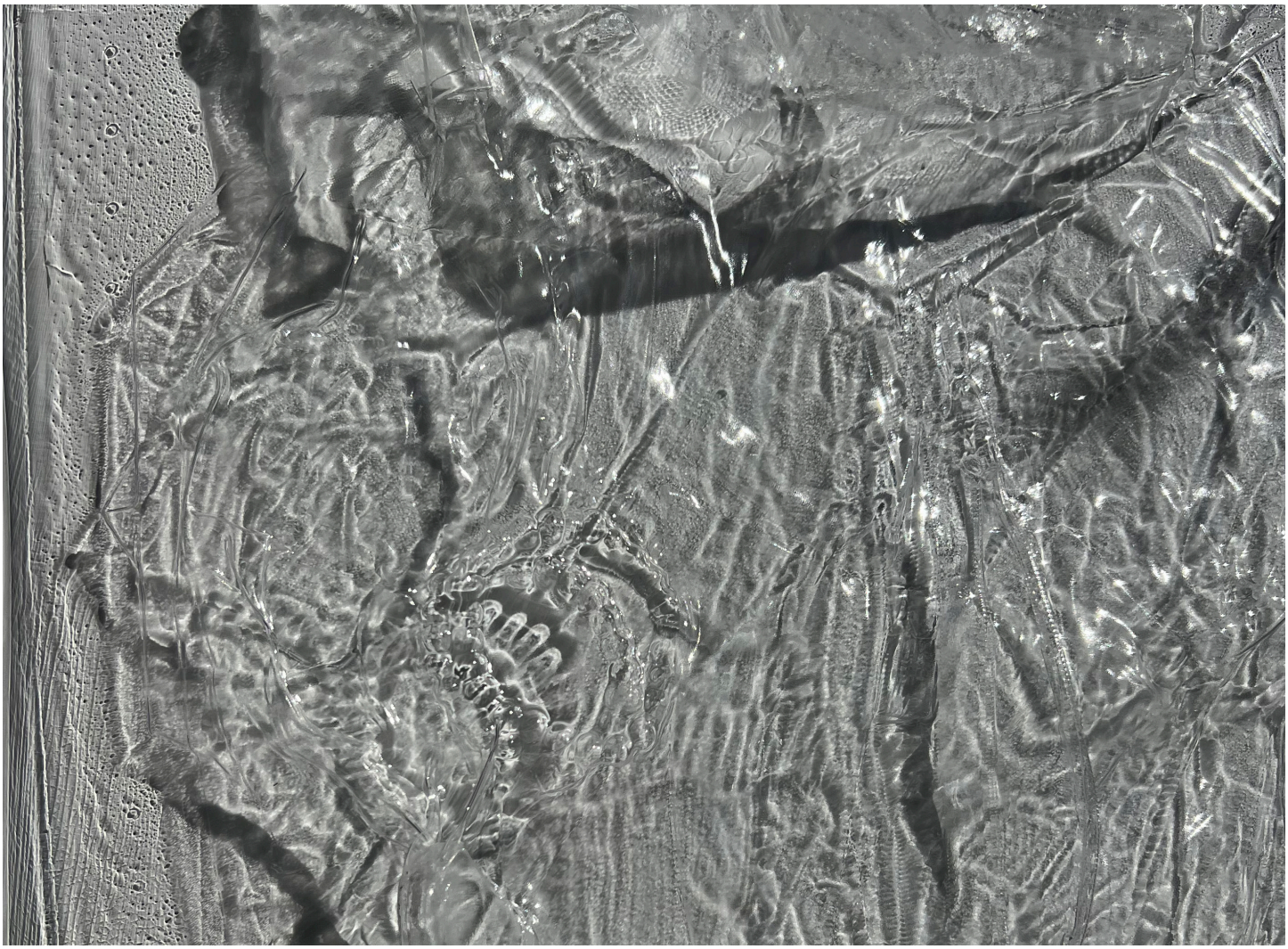
KLEDIA SPIRO

Karamele / Candy



Exhibition Catalogue

The BellSlip Gallery, 1 Bell Slip, Greenpoint,
Brooklyn, NY

September 5 – October 31, 2025

A *Qerasje*

From the very beginning, our conversations circled around reminiscence. The first time Kledia and I met in Boston, we sat together on a floating dock on the edge of Boston Harbor. We talked about learning to swim in the Adriatic Sea of Durrës when we were kids. Our bodies swayed, and our words flowed between Albanian and English. Though technically strangers, we circled a common language: remembering together and sharing that remembrance.

This act of collective memory and the notion of sharedness lie at the heart of Kledia Spiro's solo show, *Karamele/Candy*, which reflects her ongoing quest for connection and its preservation. *Karamele/Candy* is about the bittersweet emotional labor of holding on: to a homeland, to belonging, to identity, to fragments of the past — preserving what stands at the edge of forgetting. Like a *Qerasje*, an Albanian tradition of offering sweets to guests, Karamele becomes an offering in itself: a space to feel, perceive, and remember in collectivity. Through an array of communal praxes, Spiro experiments with preserving these fleeting processes and their sensory traces. In her attempt to hold onto diasporic memory, Spiro asks: How do we archive sensation? How do we map perception? What traces of memory can sound, language, and form hold?

In considering memory as intricately and biologically tied to the body and its senses, Spiro opens to multimedia microcosms activated by scent, sound, weight, and touch. Karamele displays translations of shared sensorial experiences into markmaking, music, and crystallized moments like those in her latest Karamele sculpture series, asking *"How do we archive the intangible?" "How do we carry home?"*

“I struggle to let go.”

Kledia expressed that she struggled to let go when she first began working on her latest sculptural series *Karamele*, as its making demanded the sacrifice of objects close to her heart. The resulting sculptures—some resembling glass, others stone or marble, seem pulled from a dream of a home that no longer exists. Resin conglomerates of shoes, belts, earrings, clothes, and knick-knacks are hoarded, fused, and preserved, crystallized into dreamlike terrains; memory-scapes shaped by Kledia Spiro’s own recollections of home, that become tangible, traceable and re-traceable with the stroke of a finger. Each sculpture is titled with homely idiomatic expressions or witty and wise folk sayings that become the toponymies of the imagined streets, valleys and mountains formed by Spiro’s crystallized memories. Spiro offers for these lands to be felt, heard, remembered and misremembered, holding spaces for the bittersweet shared experience of nostalgia and belonging, alongside the recognition of loss and displacement.

In conversation with the sculptures, Kledia shares auditory glimpses of home through her album, where language and sound become mapped receptacles of memory and belonging.

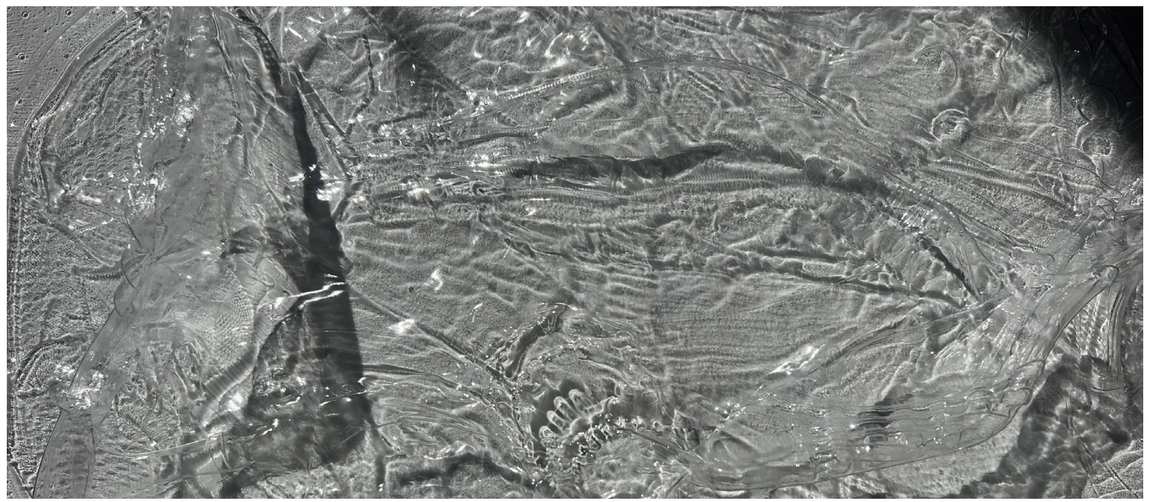
> **“I’ve been so far gone from where I was born that it is seeming too distant now. So, I feel like I just don’t belong. Music was a way to really realize that your body is home,” Kledia shares.**

Bridging electronic dance and pop influences with traditional Balkan folk music, spoken affirmations, and intergenerational wisdom, Spiro assembles a sonic archive of a transient place of belonging that she describes as *“what I grew up hearing.”* The album extends the emotional and sensory terrain of *Karamele*, offering another entry point into memory, through the musical activation of the body in dance, and through her long-standing exploration of the relationship between sound and memory.

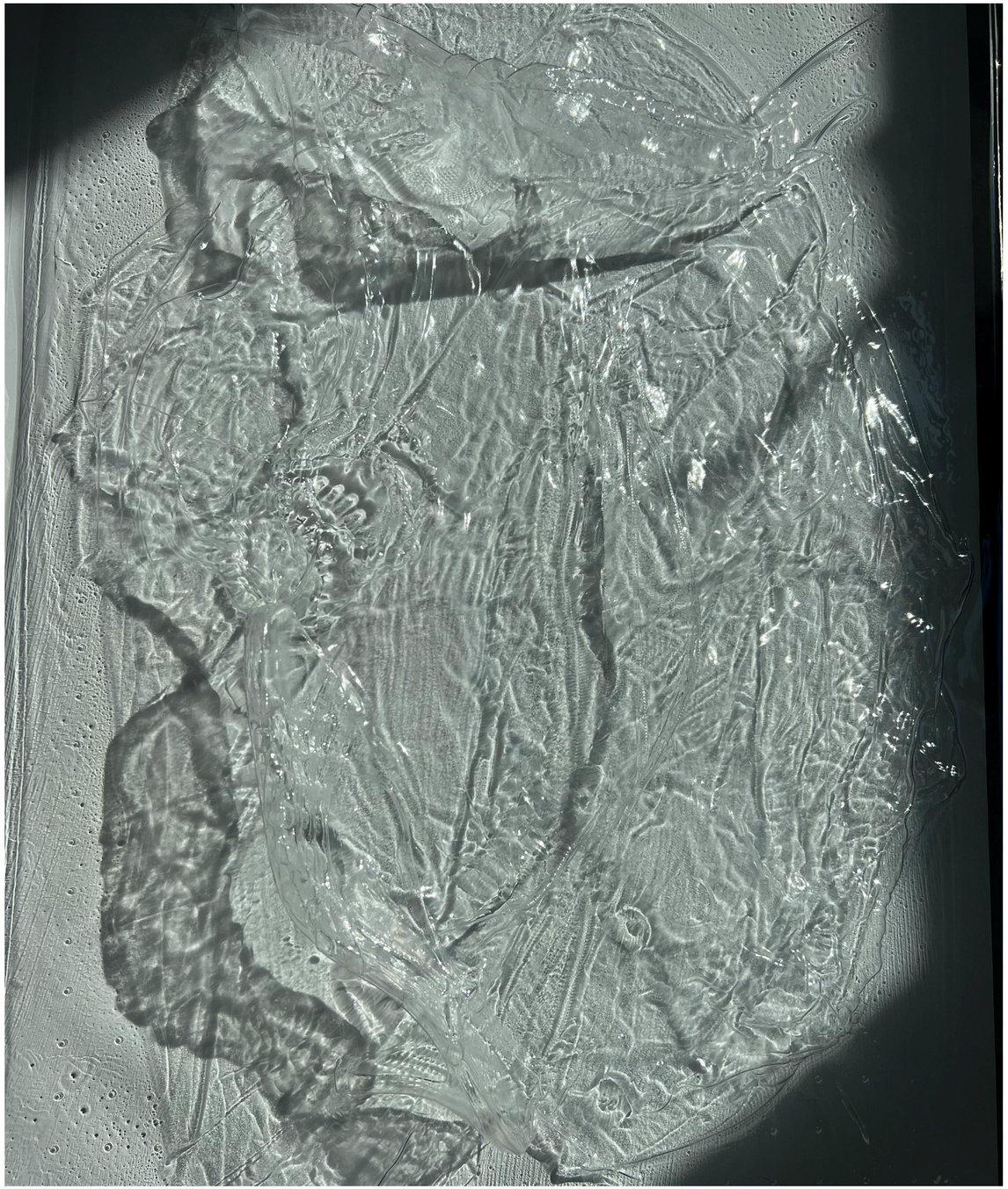
SECTION 1

Te Kristalizuara

CRYSTALIZED/WITH CLARITY



Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Te Kristalizuara*. Garments, zippers, jewelry, resin, embroidery, 20 x 28 in. (Detail)



Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Te Kristalizuara*. Garments, zippers, jewelry, resin, embroidery, 20 x 28 in.

SECTION 1

Po Pra

YES, SO

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Po Pra*. Garments, embroidered textiles, zippers, shoes, jewelry, PETG, resin, embroidery, 20 x 28 in.

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Po Pra*. Garments, embroidered textiles, zippers, shoes, jewelry, PETG, resin, embroidery, 20 x 28 in. (Detail)

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Po Pra*. Garments, embroidered textiles, zippers, shoes, jewelry, PETG, resin, embroidery, 20 x 28 in. (Detail)

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Po Pra*. Garments, embroidered textiles, zippers, shoes, jewelry, PETG, resin, embroidery, 20 x 28 in. (Detail)

Gjumin e ëmbël, të pafsha në ënder

SWEET DREAMS, I HOPE TO SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Gjumin e ëmbël, të pafsha në ënder*. Garments, embroidered textiles, zippers, shoes, jewelry, PETG, resin, embroidery, 20 x 28 in.

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Gjumin e ëmbël, të pafsha në ënder*. Garments, embroidered textiles, zippers, shoes, jewelry, PETG, resin, embroidery, 20 x 28 in. (Detail)

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Gjumin e ëmbël, të pafsha në ënder*. Garments, embroidered textiles, zippers, shoes, jewelry, PETG, resin, embroidery, 20 x 28 in. (Detail)

Sikur ka rëne nga qielli

LIKE THEY'VE FALLEN FROM THE SKY (ARROGANT/VAIN)

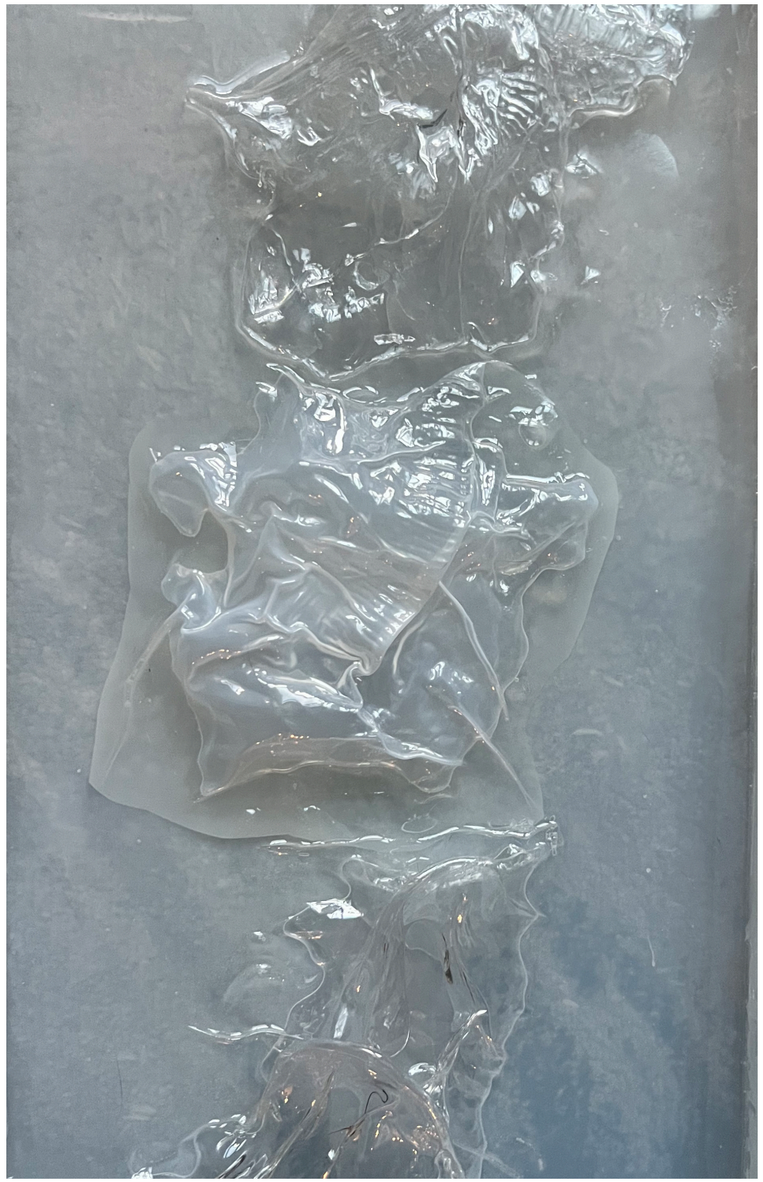
Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Sikur ka rene nga qielli*. Garments, embroidered textiles, zippers, shoes, jewelry, PETG, resin, embroidery, 20 x 28 in. (Detail)

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Sikur ka rene nga qielli*. Garments, embroidered textiles, zippers, shoes, jewelry, PETG, resin, embroidery, 20 x 28 in.

Xham fare

LIKE GLASS (ABSOLUTELY BEAUTIFUL)

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Xham fare*. Garments, zippers, jewelry, resin, embroidery, 12 x 23 in. (Detail)



Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Xham fare*. Garments, zippers, jewelry, resin, embroidery, 12 x 23 in.

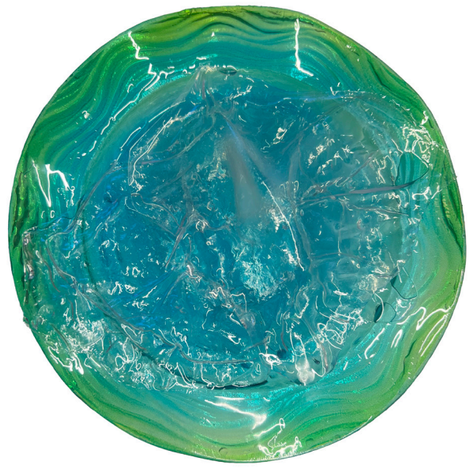
Dita e mbarë duket që kur lind dielli

A GREAT DAY CAN BE SEEN SINCE THE SUNRISE

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Dita e mbarë duket që kur lind dielli*. Glass, garments, zippers, shoes, jewelry, resin, 3 x 12 x 12 in. (Side view)

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Dita e mbarë duket që kur lind dielli*. Glass, garments, zippers, shoes, jewelry, resin, 3 x 12 x 12 in. (Detail)

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Dita e mbarë duket që kur lind dielli*. Glass, garments, zippers, shoes, jewelry, resin, 3 x 12 x 12 in. (Detail)



Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Dita e mbarë duket që kur lind dielli*. Glass, garments, zippers, shoes, jewelry, resin, 3 x 12 x 12 in. (Top view)

Rruga e shkurtër del më e gjatë

THE SHORTER ROAD (SHORTCUT) BECOMES LONGER

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Rruga e shkurtër del më e gjatë*. Clock, garments, zippers, stilettos, jewelry, resin, glass, 1.75 x 11 x11 in.

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Rruga e shkurtër del më e gjatë*. Clock, garments, zippers, stilettos, jewelry, resin, glass, 1.75 x 11 x11 in. (Detail)

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Rruga e shkurtër del më e gjatë*. Clock, garments, zippers, stilettos, jewelry, resin, glass, 1.75 x 11 x11 in. (Process)

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Rruga e shkurtër del më e gjatë*. Clock, garments, zippers, stilettos, jewelry, resin, glass, 1.75 x 11 x11 in.

SECTION 1

Tamam (Exactly)

EXACTLY

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Tamam (Exactly)*. Glass, garments, zippers, stiletto, jewelry, resin, 2.25 x 12 x 12 in.

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Tamam (Exactly)*. Glass, garments, zippers, stiletto, jewelry, resin, 2.25 x 12 x 12 in. (Detail)

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Tamam (Exactly)*. Glass, garments, zippers, stiletto, jewelry, resin, 2.25 x 12 x 12 in.

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Tamam (Exactly)*. Glass, garments, zippers, stiletto, jewelry, resin, 2.25 x 12 x 12 in. (Detail)

“I heard these same war sounds when I was doing something that I loved.”

Like many Albanians, Spiro and her family left Albania in 1997, during the height of post-dictatorial civil unrest.

“The arms depot got broken into, so everyone had military-grade weapons. I lived in Tirana...we lived on the fourth floor, and all you could hear was people opening fire from the roofs of buildings. To a kid like me, that sound just became normalized. The gunshot sounds were so big in my mind that when I came to the US I couldn’t sleep. It was just so quiet for me.”

Years later, in the seemingly unrelated context of Olympic weightlifting, Spiro encountered that sound again: the sharp, explosive crack of the barbell rotating in her hands and striking her pelvic bone. It resonated, and this unexpected convergence between the trauma of her past and the intensity of her athletic practice became a pivotal point in her artistic journey. From that moment, Spiro began to wrestle with the weight of that recognition—both literal and metaphorical. She turned to diaspora not only as not only a condition of displacement but as a state of *holding*: memories, responsibilities, grief, longing; and kept researching the notion of what it means to *lift, hold, and carry.*

“I became interested in investigating weightlifting further,” she says. “What else does it mean to humanity? Not just me, right? What does the gesture of lifting your hands up in the air mean? You lift your hands when you win, when you protest, when you’re carrying something heavy, or someone at a wedding—but you also lift your hands to give up.”

In Spiro’s practice, all these gestures are seldom solitary, becoming communal inquiries that look for the points in which individual “lifts” converge to become collective.

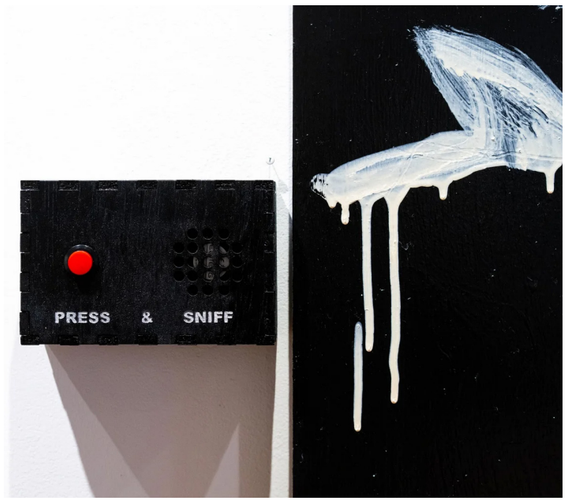
“Weightlifting may be an individual sport, but it takes a team to lift you up.”

Over the last decade, Spiro has found that team by translating this intimate, visceral practice into a collective and pedagogical one, where the inputs and outputs of shared experience, teaching and learning become a site for re-understanding and re-tracing feeling and memory.

Drawing in Air

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Drawing in Air*. Gloss enamel on wood, ultrasonic speakers and sensors, wood, momentary switch, 5V fan, cheesecloth, essential oil, 24 x 80 in. Photo courtesy of Alonso Nichols.

The paintings in the *Drawing in Air* series, marking the beginning of Spiro's experimentation with the olfactory realm, emerged from an extended pedagogical process in which she worked with middle and high school students, teaching them Olympic weightlifting and translating the movements of their lifts into data. This data was then transformed into signature light paintings, each paired with a specific scent that memorially corresponded to the individual markmaker and weightlifter. In that instance, by incorporating scent, Spiro extended her own memory and perception of the students' physical presence during the teaching experience into the sensory realm of the gallery audience, forging a multi-sensory connection established across time and space and transcending the visual encounter offered by the paintings alone.



Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Drawing in Air*. Gloss enamel on wood, ultrasonic speakers and sensors, wood, momentary switch, 5V fan, cheesecloth, essential oil, 24 x 80 in. Photo courtesy of Alonso Nichols.

Kledia Spiro, 2025, *Drawing in Air*. Gloss enamel on wood, ultrasonic speakers and sensors, wood, momentary switch, 5V fan, cheesecloth, essential oil, 24 x 80 in. Photo courtesy of Alonso Nichols.

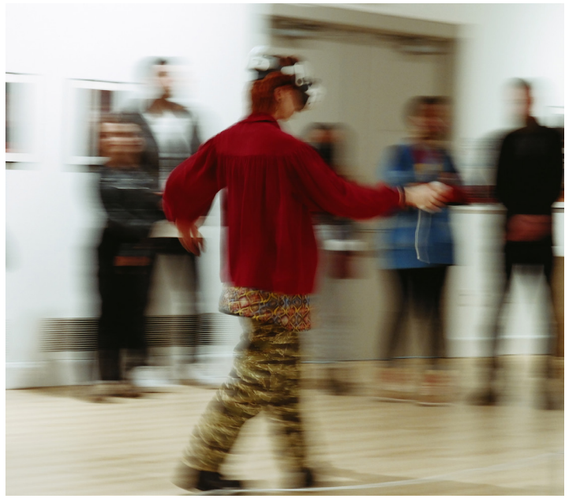
Sculpting Air

What does that smell look like?

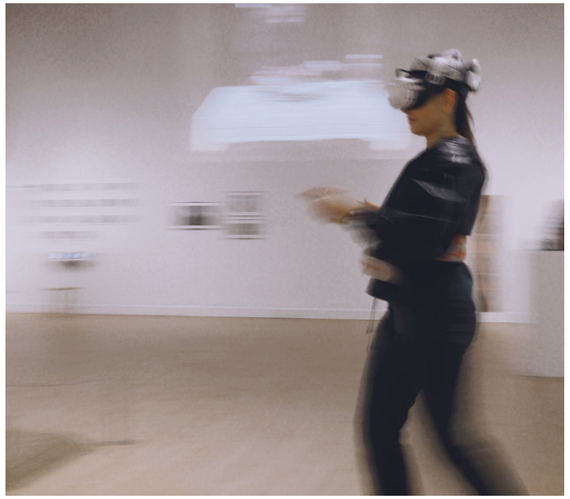
The same scents utilized in *Drawing in Air* now accompany Kledia Spiro in her performance series *Sculpting Air*, an ongoing exploration of the inextricable link between scent and memory sparked by her own longing for spaces that she can no longer inhabit:

> **"Memory is so intricately tied to scent. It's one of the few senses that goes directly into the limbic system, which is why, when you smell something from your childhood, like a cookie from your grandmother, you're instantly transported back. There's no buffer; it just takes you there. It's a kind of time travel. I find that incredibly powerful, especially as someone who can only cling to those memories. I no longer have access to my grandparents' home, or even to the house I grew up in. Scent is the only thing I can truly rely on to carry me back in time."**

Foregrounding remembrance as a shared and embodied experience, *Sculpting Air* becomes a microcosm of collaborative sensing and making. Through her own and the participants' bodily presence, via wrist or fingertip touch, Spiro invited participants to engage directly with scent, prompting them to translate these aromas, and the memories or sensations they may have evoked, into three-dimensional drawings in air. These ephemeral gestures were captured in real time within an inhabitable VR environment, where they are preserved as digital sculptures that archive these collective experiences in spatial form. In this way, Spiro transcends remembering as a solipsistic and isolated act, inviting an immersive dialogue between memory, body, scent, and technology that redefines how we experience and preserve collective remembrance.



Kledia Spiro, 2024, *Sculpting Air.* Essential oils, PVC pipe, wax cloth, VR controller, Meta quest pro headset.



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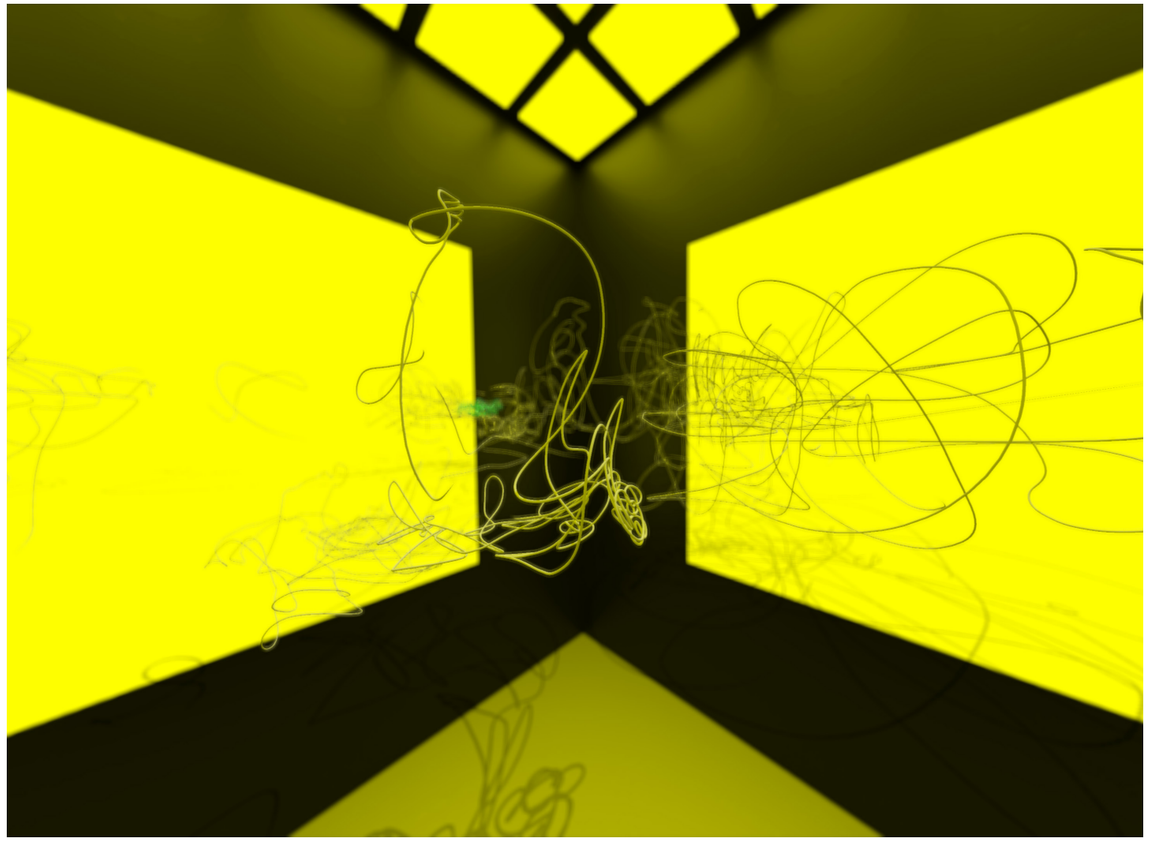

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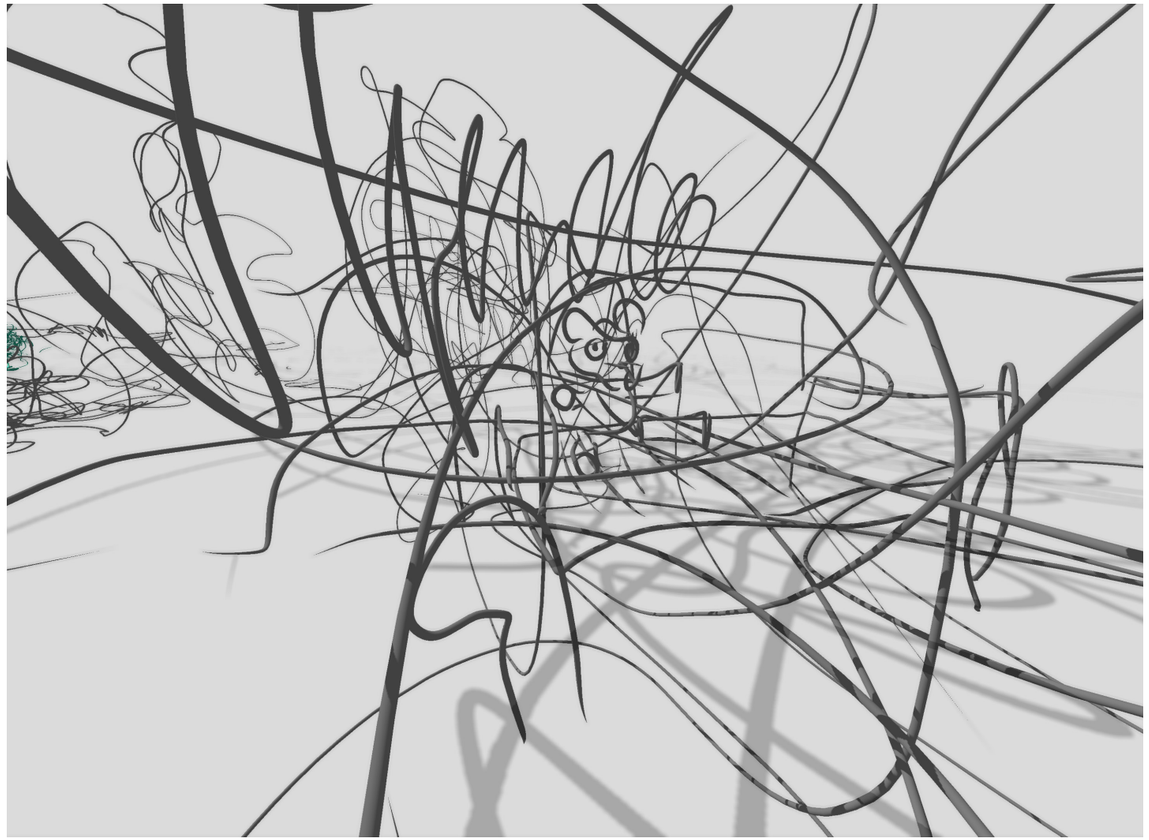

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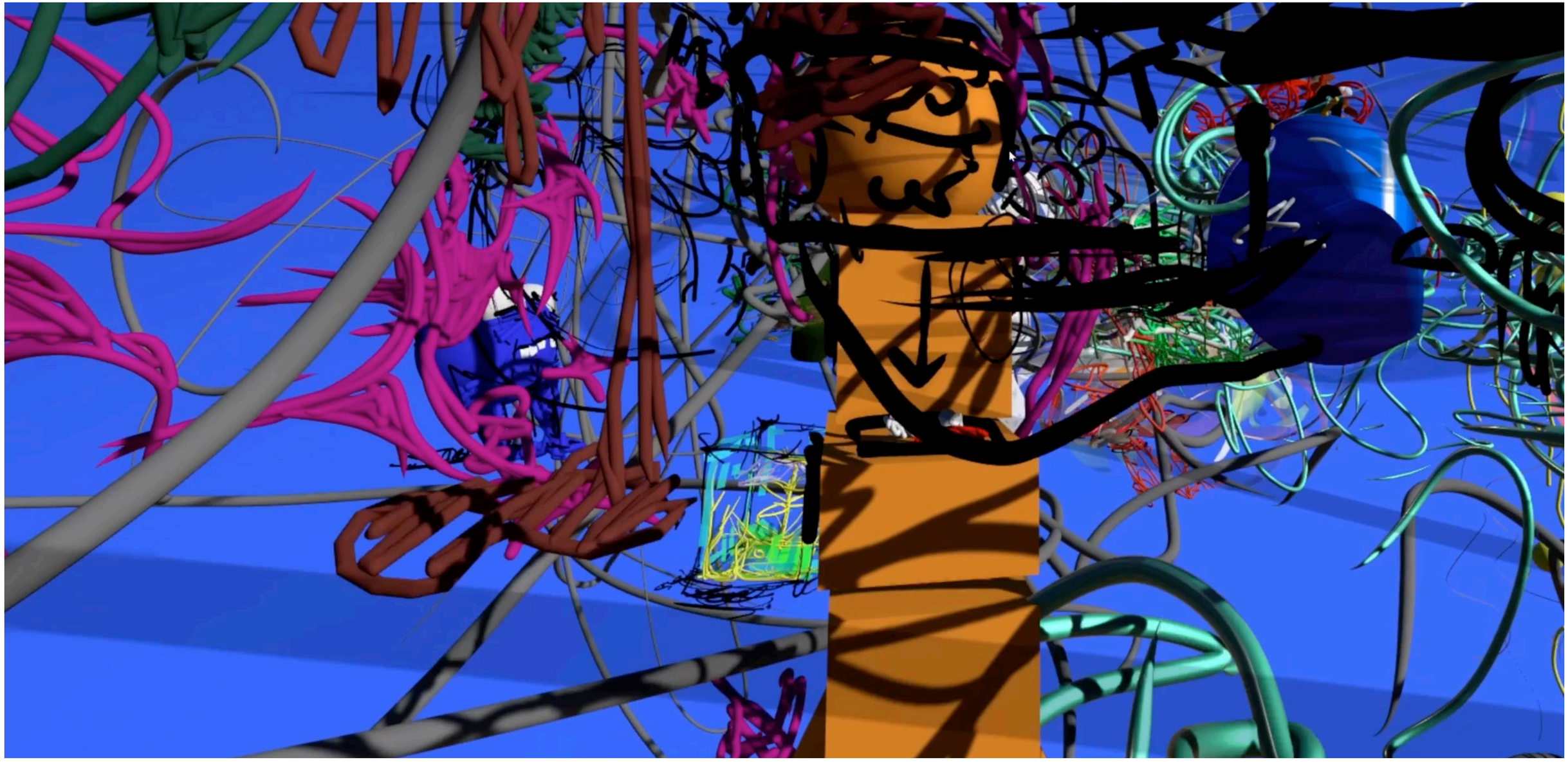

Kledia Spiro, 2024, *Sculpting Air.* Essential oils, PVC pipe, wax cloth, VR controller, Meta quest pro headset.

VIDEO
Drawing in Air (Sway), featuring Anne Goldberg Baldwin and Kevin Baldwin

VIDEO
Press and Sniff, Clio Art Fair, Armory Week 2024

VIDEO
Learning how to draw 2.0 (clip)

VIDEO
Sculpting Air: What does that smell look like?

VIDEO
Sculpting Air: Telephone (2 min section)

“ We create our memories collectively. That’s how history is made. We cannot do that in solitude.”

– Kledia Spiro

Index of included proverbs’ translations

Të kristalizuara	Crystalised/with clarity
Po pra	Yes, so
Gjumin e ëmbël, të pafsha në ëndër	Sweet dreams, I hope to see you in my dreams
Si kur ka rëne nga qelli	Like they’ve fallen from the sky (arrogant/vain)
Xham fare	Like glass (absolutely beautiful)
Dita e mbarë duket qe kur lind dielli	A great day can be seen since the sunrise
Rruga e shkurtër del më e gjatë	The shorter road (shortcut) becomes longer
Tamam	Exactly

Karamele / Candy

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